(c) Government of India is keeping a close watch and taking measures within its jurisdiction to ensure adequate availability of essential commodities. The State Governments have also been urged to do the same.

(d) and (e) Yes, Sir. Government has taken all possible measures to ensure that the household budget of the common man is not badly affected.

Government adopted the principle of equitable burden sharing amongst three stakeholders, namely, the consumers, the PSU oil companies and the Government to protect the interest of the common man and the vulnerable sections of society. Government alongwith oil companies has decided to absorb 87.5% of the burden of the escalated international prices of crude oil, amounting to Rs. 73,500 crores, leaving only a balance of 12.5 to be borne by the consumers by way of increase in petrol and diesel prices.

Government has reduced the customs duty on petrol and diesel from 10% to 7.5% in June 2006. Based on the request made to the State Government to moderate the impact of price rise on the common man, ten State Governments, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu (diesel only), Uttaranchal, Manipur and Assam, have reduced the sales tax on petrol and diesel to reduce the burden of the recent price hike.

Sale of kerosene at higher rates

*31.SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that a large number of petrol pump owners and kerosene dealers in the country are indulging in irregularities;

(b) if so, the number of dealers who have been punished during the last three years, year-wise, till date;

(c) whether a number of dealers of kerosene oil are also found selling it at a higher rate in comparison to the rates prescribed by Government; and

(d) if so, the number of such dealers detected so far and the action taken against them, till date?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MURLI DEORA): (a) The possibility of adulteration of petrol/diesel by some unscrupulous elements cannot be ruled out due to the large price difference between petrol/diesel and various adulterants available in the market which could be use for adulteration.

(b) The public sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) market petrol and diesel through their network of retail outlet dealers and kerosene through wholesale dealers. The OMCs take action against the dealers found indulging in irregularities in terms of the provisions under Marketing Discipline Guidelines. During the last three years, the OMCs have taken action against the following number of dealers for indulging in various irregularities/malpractices:—

Year	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
No. of dealers	778	616	1911

(c) and (d) The distribution of kerosense to the consumers under the Public Distribution System (PDS) is handled by the State Governments who monitor the distribution and take action against black-marketing/ overcharging of the product. Information regarding the cases where retailers/ fair price shops have been found selling PDS kerosene at a higher rate in comparison to the rate prescribed by the Government during the last three years is being collected from the States/UTs and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Petroleum smuggling

*32. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the recent reports regarding growing number of petroleum smuggling business operations in the country, particularly in Western coastal line;

(b) if so, Government's response thereto; and

(c) the details of steps taken or proposed to be taken against such illicit petroleum smuggling in the country?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MURLI DEORA): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. All Customs field formations including Directorate of Revenue Intelligence are alert and vigilant to prevent and thwart attempts of petroleum smuggling into the country particularly on Western Coast line. Based on specific intelligence regarding smuggling of HSD into the country, the DRI conducted searches and seized 8.950 MT of HSD at Kakinada Port in March, 2006. In April and May, 2006 the